DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 273 CE 081 431

TITLE The National Research and Evaluation Strategy for Vocational Education and Training, 2001-2003.

INSTITUTION National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook (Australia).

PUB DATE 2001-03-00

NOTE 29p.; For Australia's 1997-2000 Strategy, see ED 434 267.

AVAILABLE FROM National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 252 Kensington Road, Leabrook, South Australia 5068, Australia; Tel: 08 8333 8400, Fax: 08 8331 9211, E-mail: vet_req@ncver.edu.au; Web site: http://www.ncver.edu.au. For full text: http://www.ncver.edu.au/cgi-bin/gda.pl?id=1808.

PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.

DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; Comparative Analysis; Cooperative Planning; Coordination; Delivery Systems; Education Work Relationship; *Educational Assessment; Educational Change; Educational Cooperation; Educational Finance; Educational Needs; Educational Objectives; Educational Principles; Educational Quality; *Educational Research; Employment Qualifications; Equal Education; *Evaluation Methods; Financial Support; Foreign Countries; Futures (of Society); Government School Relationship; Information Dissemination; Innovation; International Educational Exchange; International Programs; Job Training; Labor Force Development; Learning Processes; Lifelong Learning; National Organizations; *National Programs; Needs Assessment; Outcomes of Education; Participative Decision Making; Partnerships in Education; Position Papers; Postsecondary Education; Public Policy; *Research Methodology; School Community Relationship; Secondary Education; Skill Development; Strategic Planning; Teaching Methods; Transitional Programs; *Vocational Education

IDENTIFIERS Australian National Training Authority; *TAFE (Australia)

ABSTRACT

Australia's second National Research and Evaluation Strategy for Vocational Education and Training (VET), which covers the period 2001-2003, builds on the following major themes contained in the first national strategy, which covered 1997-2000: stakeholder orientation, national coordination, and the importance of effective dissemination. The second national strategy also specifies the following new priorities, which were identified through consultations with VET stakeholders in 1999-2000: (1) the economics of VET; (2) lifelong learning and the social and community impact of VET; (3) innovation and the changing skills of Australia's work force; (4) transitions from education to work; (5) the VET provider; (6) the quality of teaching and learning; (7) outcomes of VET; (8) equity in VET; (9) international comparisons of VET; and (10) future development of the VET sector. Other topics addressed in the second national strategy include the following: supporting the National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998-2003; the role of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research; the role of the National Managed VET Research and Evaluation Program; the role of the Australian National Training Authority key research

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centers and partners; the dissemination of VET research; and Australia's place in the international VET research community. (MN)

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ED 450 273

NCVER

The National Research and Evaluation Strategy for Vocational Education and Training

2001-2003

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Introduction

In recent years there has been an enormous increase in the quantity and quality of vocational education and training (VET) research and evaluation in Australia. This reflects the continuing importance of vocational education and training as a major policy area for governments both in this country and overseas. Despite the fact that the links between policy making, practice and research in the VET sector are not straightforward, the aim of research and evaluation remains clear:

> ***To improve decision-making and practice in vocational education and training.***

In particular, the National Research and Evaluation Strategy is designed to contribute to national efforts to achieve the goals outlined in Australia's National VET Policy *"A Bridge to the Future: Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education & Training 1998-2003"*.

Since 1993, Australia has taken significant steps towards the creation of large body of knowledge and evidence which policy makers and practitioners can draw upon to improve the quality of VET. In that year the seminal report "No Small Change" identified the weakness and fragmented nature of research and evaluation in the VET sector. The report found that VET research was poorly funded and largely ignored by the sector. In response, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) established the ANTA Research Advisory Council (ANTARAC) in 1993. Over a three year period from 1994 to 1996, ANTARAC funded a large number of individual research projects in VET related to a set of identified national research priorities and funded the development of a number of national VET research centres. The activities of ANTARAC were critical to the development of the VET research community in Australia.

In 1996, ANTARAC was succeeded by the National Research and Evaluation Committee (NREC) which, through the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), administers the national managed research and evaluation program on behalf of ANTA. At the same time ANTA instituted a program of VET research centres. Funding of the national VET research centres and partners is managed directly by ANTA through the Key VET Research Centres national project. In 1999, as a result of the Taylor Review, NCVER was contracted to manage the NREC program for a further three years to 2002.

In 1997 NCVER produced the first National Research and Evaluation Strategy for Vocational Education and Training covering the period 1997-2000. This document represents a milestone in the development of VET research in Australia. The strategy brought together all the elements of VET research into a single coherent framework that marked the way forward for the development of VET research in Australia. This was also a world first for Australia – no other country has attempted to co-ordinate its activities in VET research through a single coherent strategy. The first national strategy emphasised three key elements:

- VET research is to be stakeholder-driven, reflecting the concerns and priorities of key groups in the VET sector;
- The research effort in vocational education and training should be co-ordinated through an agreed set of priority research areas which define the overall scope and direction of research and evaluation;
- Effective dissemination of the results of research to stakeholders is as important a component of the national research strategy as doing the research.

As a result of this significant boost to funding for VET research and evaluation, a large and vibrant VET research community has developed in Australia. Between 1997 and 1999, 113 research and evaluation projects were funded under the national managed program. At any one time over 70 projects are under management through the NCVER. Since 1997, ANTA has

funded on a three year cycle three national key centres for VET research with a fourth being funded since 2000. The centres represent concentrations of VET researchers with expertise in particular disciplines that carry out integrated programs of research on particular themes. Apart from these two nationally funded programs, over 20 centres specialising in VET research have emerged across the country which carry out significant research on aspects of policy and practice in the sector. The size and diversity of the new VET research community is reflected in the development of the Australian VET Research Association (AVETRA). Holding its first conference in 1998, AVETRA has a membership of over 300 individual researchers. Nor are these researches all located in the university sector; over half of AVETRA members work in the VET sector itself (VET teachers are the largest single category of membership) and up to 40 per cent of submissions for NREC funding come from non-university researchers.

The massive expansion of VET research and evaluation has also been accompanied by the development of new approaches to research. Collaborative research involving multiple partners from different institutional backgrounds has become increasingly the norm. Teams of researchers that combine the professional researcher's methodological expertise with the VET practitioner's knowledge and understanding of the VET system are often particularly successful at producing reliable and influential research. The specification of priority areas for research has led to the development of highly relevant research projects focused on the needs of the users of research in the sector. As result, the quality of VET research has been increasing at the same time as its quantity has been expanding.

In international terms, Australia has moved to the forefront of VET research and evaluation from a relatively weak position in the early 1990s. Many countries invest in programs of VET research. In the United States the recently created National Centers for Career and Technical Education Research and Dissemination have replaced the former National Centre for Research in Vocational Education with a five-year, federally funded program of research and dissemination in VET issues. In Europe, many of the member countries of the European Union maintain their own national programs of VET research through organisations such as the Centre for Research on Education, Training and Employment (CEREQ) in France and the Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BIBB) in Germany. However, much of the funding for VET research in Europe is channelled through the European Union's own agencies and programs such as the Leonardo and Socrates programs and the work of CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training). Although the funding for these large-scale programs of VET research may seem to dwarf the amounts spent in this country, Australian VET research has adopted a much more focused and strategic approach than many of these overseas examples. Although we face similar problems in vocational education, no other country has developed a coherent national strategy for VET research and evaluation. In many other countries, effective dissemination strategies are also often lacking. In many ways, Australia leads the world in effective VET research.

A key development in the last three years and one which will be critical in the lifetime of the current strategy is the role of the research user. It is one thing to increase the quantity and quality of research and evaluation in the VET sector. It is quite another thing to ensure that the research has an impact on policy and practice in the sector. Users of research are now closely involved in the formulation of the priorities for VET research. Policy makers and practitioners are represented on the National Research and Evaluation Committee and sit on the Boards of the five major national research centres/partners. Consultations for this strategy included a broad cross-section of users in the VET sector at all levels.

More importantly, a central feature of the national managed research and evaluation program and those of the national research centres is the effective dissemination of research. In part, dissemination is about finding new ways of getting the messages from the research out to audiences that can act upon it. NCVER and other centres have developed a number of new ways to disseminate research findings including intensive face-face workshops on key topics, enhanced use of the world wide web, short, synthesis publications and so on. The development of new and better means of dissemination will continue but increasingly the emphasis in VET research should be on going beyond dissemination. This means finding

ways of bringing research directly into decision-making processes at the level of both policy and practice. There are clear examples of this now happening in the VET sector but it remains a challenge for the VET research community to ensure that the results of research improve the quality of vocational education and training in Australia.

This second National Research and Evaluation Strategy for Vocational Education and Training builds on the major themes contained in the first strategy and covers the period 2001-2003. The key elements of stakeholder orientation, national co-ordination and the importance of effective dissemination continue to provide the basic rationale for the strategy whilst a revised set of priorities reflects the emerging issues impinging on the development of the VET sector. The priorities in this strategy direct the work of the NCVER and the national managed research and evaluation program and inform the work of other VET research groups throughout the country including the ANTA Key Research Centres and Partners. Similarly, dissemination is not confined to research carried out by the NCVER or under the national managed program but also includes all VET research carried out in Australia and internationally.

National Research and Evaluation Priorities 2001-2003

During late 1999 and early 2000 a series of consultations were carried out with major stakeholders in the VET system that focused on the key priorities for VET research in the period 2000-2003. Stakeholders that were consulted included:

- The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
- The Australian National Training Authority
- State and Territory Training Authorities
- The Australian Council of Trade Unions
- The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- The Business Council of Australia
- The Australian Industry Group.

Other stakeholders were included in the consultation process through a questionnaire. These included:

- Institutes and Colleges of Technical and Further Education
- National and State Industry Training Advisory Bodies
- Private Registered Training Organisations
- The Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association

The consultations led to the identification of new priorities not covered in the 1997-2000 strategy as well as the refinement of the existing research priorities. As a result, ten key priority areas have been identified for the national research and evaluation strategy:

1. The economics of vocational education and training
2. Lifelong learning and the social and community impact of VET
3. Innovation and the changing skills of the Australian workforce
4. Transitions from education to work
5. The vocational education and training provider
6. The quality of teaching and learning
7. Outcomes of vocational education and training
8. Equity in vocational education and training
9. International comparisons of VET
10. The future development of the VET sector

The economics of vocational education and training

Investment in vocational education and training is a critical economic issue. Investment is essential from the viewpoint of improving Australia's global competitiveness. It also represents significant expenditure in both the public and private components of the VET sector by governments, employers and individuals. Research is required into the financing of the VET system in Australia, the returns to individuals, groups and enterprises of investments in training, the changing demand for vocational education and training arising from the rapid pace of global economic change and the modelling of the impact of different forms of VET on the Australian economy.

In particular a major focus is needed on:

- The changing patterns of demand for vocational education and training and how these changes are linked to the changing nature of work and the global economy
- How effectively the supply of VET matches the changing demand in the economy and how mismatches might identified and overcome
- How business makes decisions to invest in VET and the major factors that influence these decisions
- What is the relationship between business investment in training and the changing structure of employment
- The returns to individuals, groups and businesses of investments in VET and how these returns are realised over time
- The respective roles of government, business and individuals in the financing of VET
- Research that can contribute to a greater understanding by the community in general about the economic and social importance of Australia's vocational education and training effort, particularly in terms of its importance to our economic future

Lifelong learning and the social and community impact of VET

The notion of lifelong learning has become a major platform for efforts to improve investments by individuals and communities in all forms of education but particularly in vocational education and training worldwide. However, the concept of lifelong learning still lacks clarity and its implications for the VET system have not been well documented. Research is required to examine the economic, social and demographic forces that are moving Australia towards a culture of lifelong learning. Research also needs to be undertaken that documents the impact of VET on society and the community more broadly and highlights the non-economic benefits of vocational education and training for individuals and groups. Issues to be addressed under this priority include:

- The economic and social forces driving the development of a culture of lifelong learning in Australia
- The practical aspects of the implementation of lifelong learning within the VET system
- The changing social structure of the Australian workforce and the emerging need for adult re-skilling
- The involvement of the adult and community education sector in VET and determining what factors drive this involvement.
- How VET systems designed to meet the needs primarily of young people will adapt to the increasing demand for adult re-skilling and lifelong learning.
- The role of modularised delivery in facilitating lifelong learning.
- What is the return to the community of public investment in VET
- How well is the national VET system placed to meet the needs of all segments of the learning community?
- What models of learning communities are there in Australia and what lessons do these models hold for the VET system?

Innovation and the changing skills of the Australian workforce

The national strategy should be focussed on examining how well Australia's vocational education and training system is meeting the changing needs of business. Economic and social change globally is resulting in ongoing major structural change in Australia's economy and the VET system faces considerable difficulties in keeping up with these changes. At the same time new skills requirements are emerging which incorporate all those skills that are

called generic skills/key competencies or soft skills (for example team work, communication skills, problem solving), as well as information and communications technology skills and entrepreneurial skills. The role of VET in the national innovation system is also critical. The national VET research and evaluation strategy needs particularly to address:

- What are the new skills that are required by the Australian workforce – what skills are in the ascendant and what skills are becoming redundant?
- How is technological change driving the emergence of new skills and how can these be resourced?
- What are the implications of the rise of the "new economy" for skill requirements in the workforce?
- What skill shortages are arising in the Australian economy, what are the reasons for these shortages and how can the VET system help to overcome them?
- What is the role of ACE in developing the skills of the Australian workforce?
- Are generic skills included in training packages? Do training packages give sufficient focus to the attainment of generic skills?
- How do clients of the VET sector who have no employment or who are doing preparatory courses acquire generic skills?
- What effective methods exist for determining future skills needs at the system and enterprise levels?
- How responsive is the VET system to skills shortages arising from cyclical movements in the economy?
- Role of VET in national innovation.

Transitions from education to work

The national strategy should incorporate a program of research and evaluation that more systematically analyses the pathways young Australians take in the transition from education to work, with a view to developing better arrangements to facilitate the transition. A key element of the 1997-2000 strategy was a suite of research on apprenticeships and traineeships. This area will continue as a priority in the national strategy. A key area for investigation will be the impact of VET in schools programs. Some key issues requiring more investigation and analysis are:

- The patterns of participation by young Australians in education, training and work and the implications of this for developing better pathways to facilitate the effective transition into the workforce
- The uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships with particular emphasis on the factors that increase the opportunities made available to young people by employers
- barriers to the provision of high quality, entry-level training in Australia
- implications for reform of apprenticeship and traineeship arrangements and the development of new arrangements to serve Australia's needs in the future
- examining how young people and their families make choices about entry-level training, with a view to developing better strategies to provide relevant and appropriate entry-level training arrangements in Australia
- Has the implementation of VET in schools facilitated the development of multiple pathways?
- What is the optimum level of VET provision in schools?
- Does VET in schools meet the needs of young people at risk of early school leaving and, if not, who meets their needs?
- What career guidance is available to students at school? Who are the counsellors?
- What factors are causing the growth in VET in schools?

The vocational education and training provider

The work of training providers and the professionals who work within them is of critical importance to the operation of a high quality VET system in Australia. Recent reforms that have opened up the training market to increased competition have highlighted the role of quality VET providers. In the pursuit of quality the role of management and leadership at all levels is crucial. At the same time, the role of the VET professional has broadened and become more externally focused. A research program is needed which explores all activities of VET providers in the context of ensuring the maintenance of a high quality VET system. Key issues for consideration under this priority include:

- What are the major factors that determine the success of different types of VET provider in giving students a high quality learning experience?
- How well are VET providers set up to facilitate the development of lifelong learning in the population? What changes are necessary in order for providers to achieve the aims of the lifelong learning initiatives?
- How do employers view the quality of VET?
- How has the nature and composition of the VET workforce changed over time?
- How can the professional culture of VET teachers/trainers be improved?
- What has been the impact of new technologies on the VET workforce?
- What has been the impact of changes to work in the VET sector on the role of the VET professional?
- What are the skills and competencies needed of both senior management and front-line management (department heads) within registered training organisations? How can leadership knowledge be put into practice in the VET sector?
- What is the role of the workplace traineer in the delivery of VET?

The quality of teaching and learning in VET

There is a need to identify the components of a high quality/high performance VET system. Reforms to the VET system have encouraged the growth of VET provision in non-traditional settings. There is a need to understand how quality can be assured in such settings. The delivery of VET is becoming more flexible, particularly with the introduction of new learning technologies. These have significant ramifications for the ways in which teachers operate and the ways in which students learn. Key issues to be addressed under this priority include:

- The effectiveness of workplace learning in the context of the growth of on-the-job training.
- What are the most accepted and recognised indicators/components of a quality VET system?
- What are the major models of risk management/assessment in a VET system?
- A comprehensive examination of the impact of new learning technologies in terms of cost effectiveness, pedagogy and the development needs of VET practitioners.
- What are the learning characteristics/styles of the diverse range of VET students?
- What are the barriers to effective innovation in teaching and learning in VET?
- How effective are the different forms of delivery and assessment that are commonly used in the VET sector and how is their effectiveness measured?
- How do VET teachers/trainers absorb and adopt new approaches to teaching and learning?
- Identification of excellent performance of students at the institutional level.
- What has been the impact of recognition of prior learning on quality in VET?

Outcomes of vocational education and training

There is an ongoing need to explore the outcomes of VET for different groups of clients and the factors that determine them. Although work has been carried out in this area under the 1997-2000 national strategy, most of the research has focused on the short term, on the outcomes that are currently measured for the purpose of performance reporting in the VET system (that is module completion, jobs, income, satisfaction) and on outcomes for specific groups of VET clients. There is a need for research on attrition, more work on qualifications and more research with a longer-term focus as well as research into what other outcomes should be measured. Key issues for investigation under this priority include:

- What is the difference in outcomes between institute and work based learning?
- The identification of any differences in outcomes associated with different modes of delivery (i.e. workplace training, classroom training, new technologies, group training, etc.)
- How well do VET outcomes relate to the principles of lifelong learning.
- The use and value of qualifications to employers and individuals. Does industry want workers with qualifications? What is the mix of demand for qualifications and skills amongst employers and employees? How are qualifications used by employers and by employees?
- What outcomes are being achieved 2, 5 or 10 years down the track by the various groups of students who undertake VET courses?
- What are the reasons for attrition and non-completion in VET? Where are non-completions happening? What are student intentions on enrolment? How many students stay in their trade/occupation when they complete? Where do they move on to if they leave?
- What are the appropriate outcomes and measures for a VET system based on lifelong learning?
- Is the VET sector meeting the education and training needs of people in regional Australia

Equity in vocational education and training

Much work was commissioned under the 1997-2000 strategy on issues of equity in VET. The experiences of many groups within Australian society of the VET system have been carefully documented in this research. However, there is a need to continue the focus on equity which remains a key element of the ANTA National Strategy for VET 1998-2003.

- How the participation in VET of equity groups has changed over time and what factors drive these changes
- How do factors such as client characteristics, provider strategies and local and systemic factors interact to produce outcomes for different groups?
- What are inclusive models of participation that address the needs of students at risk?
- Identification of whole-of-government strategies to overcome disadvantage in VET participation.
- The outcomes and experiences of VET for different groups of clients, with a view to the development of strategies to improve their success rates from training.

International comparisons of VET

Increasing globalisation is leading to convergence and integration between VET systems in different countries. Australia is now a major exporter of vocational education and training, particularly in the Asian region. The need to create an internationally competitive skilled workforce means that Australia needs a world class VET system in order to secure its future prosperity. As a result, there is an increasing need to compare the performance of the

Australian VET system with those of other countries. Australia has much to learn from rigorous international comparisons but these are difficult because of the way in which international data are gathered and published. The national research strategy needs to encourage high quality international research, which will help to guide the development of the Australian VET system in the long term. Key issues for investigation under this priority include:

- How does the Australian VET system compare to a range of other countries along a number of measurable dimensions?
- How possible are valid international comparisons and how can simple measurements be made?
- What are the strengths of the Australian VET system compared to those of other countries?
- How is the issue of generic skills being dealt with by the VET sector in other countries?
- The development of models for the international recognition of qualifications
- What do international studies reveal about the delivery of VET in different regions and across different industries?

The future development of the VET sector

Along with the need to address key priority issues for the VET sector, the national research strategy also needs to address longer-term developments that will impact on the future of the VET sector and examine some of the fundamental assumptions upon which policy and practice are based. Issues to be addressed under this priority include:

- What has been the overall performance of the national VET system?
- Is the VET system producing a more highly skilled workforce?
- How is consistency to be achieved in the national VET system?
- Is it possible to attain an appropriate balance between VET and higher education delivery and funding in order to meet the nation's economic needs?
- What has been the impact of the development of an open market in the VET sector?
- What are the implications of developments in e-commerce for the VET system?
- How can the VET system contribute to the development of a knowledge economy in Australia?
- How has the role and function of group training companies developed in the VET system?
- What are the key management issues at the levels of both policy development and training delivery in the VET system?
- How can the policy making process be improved in the VET sector?

Supporting the National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998-2003

In 1998, the Australian National Training Authority released the National Strategy for VET 1998-2003, *A Bridge to the Future*. This document laid out a vision for VET in Australia under five broad headings:

- Equipping Australians for the world of work
- Enhancing mobility in the labour market
- Achieving equitable outcomes in vocational education and training
- Increasing investment in training
- Maximising the value of public vocational education and training expenditure.

The National Research and Evaluation Strategy for VET 2001-2003 has been designed to complement the realisation of *A Bridge to the Future* by ensuring that the component parts of the strategy are shaped in such a way that policy formation at the national level is underpinned by significant national research. The following table maps the component parts of *A Bridge to the Future* to the key priorities of the national research and evaluation strategy 2001-2003.

National Strategy for VET 1998-2003 *(Bridge to the Future)*	National Research and Evaluation Strategy for VET 2001-2003
Equipping Australians for the world of work ❖ Building the national stock of skills to meet the needs of industry ❖ Expanding pathways and options ❖ Encouraging flexible registered training organisations	❖ Innovation and the changing skills of the Australian workforce ❖ Transitions from education to work ❖ The VET provider
Enhancing mobility in the labour market ❖ Ensuring that skills are nationally recognised ❖ Seamless post-compulsory pathways ❖ Emphasising key competencies and cross industry competency standards ❖ Improving language, literacy and numeracy skills	❖ Innovation and the changing skills of the Australian workforce ❖ Transitions from education to work ❖ Innovation and the changing skills of the Australian workforce ❖ Innovation and the changing skills of the Australian workforce
Achieving equitable outcomes in VET	❖ Outcomes for VET ❖ Equity in VET

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Increasing investment in training ❖ Addressing the economic imperative to build the national stock of skills ❖ Developing a training culture ❖ Increasing investment in training by industry ❖ Maximising returns on investment	❖ Economics of VET ❖ Lifelong learning and the social and community impact of VET ❖ Lifelong learning and the social and community impact of VET ❖ Economics of VET
Maximising the value of public VET expenditure ❖ Improving efficiency	❖ Economics of VET ❖ Quality of teaching and learning

Achieving the National Research and Evaluation Strategy for VET

Since the seminal report by Prof Rod McDonald and his colleagues at the University of Technology, Sydney in 1993, *No Small Change*, the VET research landscape has altered dramatically. No Small Change painted a picture of a fragmented and chronically under-funded research activity that had little or no relevance to the major policy questions of the day or to the needs of practitioners in the VET system. Now VET research and evaluation has become a major area for the national research effort and is having a substantial influence on policy debate and on practice within the VET sector.

The Role of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)

The NCVER is the primary national body for VET research and evaluation in Australia. NCVER collects, analyses and publishes a wide range of statistics relating to the VET system in Australia. The national statistical collections are funded by the Australian National Training Authority. There are three national collections:

1. The VET collection, which comprises information about VET providers and programs, including levels and fields of education, student characteristics, and level of activity
2. The Contracts of Training (COT) collection which relates to apprentices and trainees, their characteristics and program information
3. Financial data which is the primary source of information about how VET in Australia is financed and where the money is spent.

Collected under the AVETMIS standard, these collections provide an extensive database of information on the Australian VET system which is increasingly being used by researchers inside and outside the NCVER. In addition to the data collections, NCVER also carries out a number of national surveys including:

- The Student Outcomes Survey which gathers information on VET students, and their outcomes in terms of employment, satisfaction and further education.
- The Survey of Employer Views on VET and their level of satisfaction with the skills of VET graduates.

NCVER also carries out an in-house (core) research program of its own. This program of research is based on 6 themes:

- **Longitudinal studies**. This includes work on training and employment outcomes of graduates of TAFE in South Australia, collaborative work with ACER on outcomes from VET in schools and outcomes from school-industry programs.
- **Delivery of VET** including work on the effectiveness of new technology in VET and the teaching of generic skills through training packages.
- **Industry training** which includes projects on the state of industry training in Australia and the changing role of the HRD practitioner, the training needs of emerging industries and the determinants of successful training at the firm level.
- **Lifelong learning** including projects on developing indicators of training, module-only enrolments and how firms meet the training needs of their existing workers.
- **Research based on the NCVER statistical collections** including the outcomes from enabling courses, the role of private providers in skill development and the outcomes of apprentices in small-medium sized enterprises.
- **International aspects of VET**. Two projects are currently being carried out with the Korean Research Institute in VET on adult retraining and reskilling and the links between industry and training providers in both countries.

NCVER administers the national managed vocational education and training research and evaluation program on behalf of ANTA. In this capacity, NCVER plays a central role in the management of VET research and evaluation including:

- Providing a secretariat function for the National Research and Evaluation Committee (NREC)
- Co-ordinating the establishment of research priorities for the national managed program
- Producing the National Research and Evaluation Strategy for VET
- Managing research projects funded by NREC
- Disseminating the results of research and evaluation to the VET community.

The Role of the National Managed VET Research and Evaluation Program

Since 1997 ANTA has funded the national managed VET research and evaluation program which provides national competitive research grants for the VET sector. The program is managed by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research and directed and overseen by the National Research and Evaluation Committee (NREC). NREC is established as a sub-committee of the NCVER Board and ensures that the users of research have a significant input into the research work that is funded under the national VET research and evaluation strategy.

NREC comprises twelve members as follows:

- Chair: NCVER Board member
- Four nominees of the ANTA CEOs committee
- Three NCVER nominees of individuals with experience and expertise in VET research and evaluation
- Two ANTA Board industry nominees
- One ANTA nominee
- One Commonwealth nominee.

The terms of reference for NREC are:

1. To provide advice on national priorities for research and evaluation in VET as the basis for a strategic plan for research and evaluation
2. To oversee the implementation of national priorities in research and evaluation within the budget and work program of the NCVER and ANTA
3. To provide advice to NCVER on the allocation of funds in line with an identified work program for research and evaluation
4. To assist NCVER in, and provide advice to ANTA on, the promotion and dissemination of research and evaluation within the national VET systems

In 1999, following the Taylor Review of the national managed program, NCVER was contracted by ANTA to manage the program for a further three years from 2000 to 2002.

Within NCVER, the National VET Research and Evaluation branch co-ordinates the program, and provides an executive and secretarial service to NREC. ANTA funds the program at a level of $2.2 million per annum over three years with a provision for indexation. Of this sum, approximately $400,000 funds the management of the program. The remainder is spent on direct research funding and a range of dissemination activities.

Three types of research project are typically funded under the national managed program.

1. **Key priorities**. Each year, NREC identifies a set of key priority research areas which reflect emerging and significant issues in the VET sector. Submissions are called for to address important questions within these key priority research areas.
2. **Open category research**. NREC recognises that key priority areas may not address all the important issues facing the sector and that the national research strategy should be encouraging the generation of original and innovative research proposals from the VET

research community. Thus a significant proportion of the research funding available each year is directed towards proposals submitted by researchers in the open category.

3. **Consolidation studies**. As well as funding original research, the national managed program also funds shorter studies which aim to consolidate research findings in particular areas and which can act as springboard for further empirical work by identifying gaps in the research.

The program is administered as a national competitive grant program using the following process:

- Submissions are called for through a general advertisement in the national press at least once per year. The main round of grant funding may be supplemented from time to time by smaller rounds which target certain key priority areas for research highlighted by NREC.
- Submissions are evaluated through a process of peer review involving members of the National Research and Evaluation Committee and others and a number are selected for funding.
- Contracts are drawn up with the proposing institutions of the submissions which have been selected for funding which detail the research questions to be addressed, the methodology to be employed, the budget and the timelines for delivery.
- During the life of the research projects, interim reports are submitted to the NCVER which are subject to blind peer review and the results of the review made available to the researchers involved.
- A final report is submitted at the end of the contract period and a dissemination strategy agreed which may involve the production of a report, production of other more targeted publications and/or participation in workshops open to users of the research.

Review of the 1997-1999 Program

Over the period 1997-1999, 113 projects were funded through the national managed program. NREC inherited 27 projects funded under ANTA Research Advisory Council in 1995 and 1996. Of the 113 projects, 32 were consolidation studies and 81 were research projects.

During 1997- 1999 the following priorities were nominated by NREC and research projects were funded accordingly:

1997	1998	1999
equity	return to the enterprise of an investment in training	Australia's apprenticeship/traineeship system
job change/industry outlook	changing nature of work	training/learning culture
schools and VET	evaluation of CBT	participation/entitlement to training
small business	cross sectoral studies (scoping studies)	outcomes of VET
training market	lifelong learning	evaluation of training packages
consolidation studies	internationalisation of VET	evaluation of frontline management initiative
workplace learning		
future visions and VET		

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Other themes which have been dealt with across the three funding rounds include:

- Outcomes of VET
- Assessment (particularly a competency-based approach and how to improve the validity and quality of assessment in a competency-based approach)

The general themes that have been dealt with through consolidation studies include:

- equity groups
- language and literacy
- international comparisons of VET systems
- on-line delivery
- range of other issues including market reform, small business, outcomes of VET, assessment

The success rate of applications for funding under the national managed program is similar to other national competitive funding schemes. In the 1998 and 1999 funding rounds NREC received a total of 307 submissions of which 56 were successful in gaining funding. On this crude measure, the success rate for submissions during this period was approximately 18%. In addition during this period a further 10 projects were commissioned.

During this period VET research was conducted mainly by:

- university research centres (60%)
- private consultants (32%)
- TAFE institutes (5%)

In terms of the three categories of research that are generally funded (research projects addressing key priorities, research projects under the open category and consolidation studies)

- approximately 70% of the research funding addressed key priority areas
- approximately 24% of the research funding addressed issues raised through the open category
- approximately 6% of the research funding went into consolidation studies.

The 2000-2002 Research Program

Each year, within the parameters of the national strategy, NREC establishes a series of priorities for research and evaluation over the following 12-18 months. These priorities are established in consultation with ANTA and other key stakeholders in the VET system including DETYA, State and Territory Training Authorities and peak industry and union bodies. Consultations in 1999/2000 set the following broad priority areas

Quality of VET provision. Since 1996 there has been considerable work undertaken in the VET sector to develop quality frameworks and quality approaches within the VET sector. The National Training Framework provides quality assurance measures at a national level in relation to training packages and registered training providers. Each State and Territory has developed a quality framework for their VET system and colleges and registered training providers have put in place quality systems. These State/Territory quality systems have focused primarily on the management system within VET providers. The research to be funded relates to the quality of provision – particularly when it is delivered totally on the job and in a range of providers and invites research proposals which will address the questions listed below.

The VET Professional. The numerous changes that have been put in place in the VET sector in the last 10 years have all had an impact on the traditional role of the VET professional – that is teachers, trainers, assessors, providers of learning support in both the public and

private training market. Research has shown that VET practitioners feel their role is changing from a traditional teacher/trainer to an expanded role that includes mentoring in industry, training brokerage, assessing in industry as well as facilitating learning and providing learning support. Thus VET professionals are now expected to fulfil a wider range of roles and this brings with it the expectation that they all have the skills, knowledge, understanding and aptitudes for these new and expanding roles.

Management and leadership in VET. Despite the fact that VET institutions increasingly operate in a highly competitive and commercialised training market – often with a significant international dimension to their operations – little work has been done on the changing nature of the role of the senior manager in VET providers and the qualities and skills that are demanded within the role. There is a need to carry out basic research on the role, functions and skills required of senior managers and directors within VET providers as well as the role of the front-line manager and the ways in which these groups may be developed for the future.

Innovation and new skills for the workforce. The term 'new skills for the workforce' is being used here to incorporate all those skills that are called generic skills/key competencies or soft skills (for example team work, communication skills, problem solving), as well as information and communications technology skills and entrepreneurial skills. The essential issue here is the effectiveness of the VET sector in equipping learners with the full range of these skills to the standard that is expected of them in the new world of work - whether that work takes the form of a job, contract work, self-employment or volunteer work. Research is needed to develop the concept of generic skills and relate the different concepts to the emerging needs of employers and individuals. Research also needs to address the issue of innovation and the growth of the knowledge economy.

Flexible learning and teaching. Recent research has identified that there has been a relative neglect of learning aspects of flexible delivery including the application of adult learning principles and an analysis of the learning benefits and outcomes of alternative delivery strategies. Research has also pointed to the need for consideration of the implications of lifelong learning, cultural influences on learning strategies and the need for longitudinal studies.

Outcomes of VET. This theme has been addressed in the last two years of the managed research program. To date most of the research activity relating to outcomes has focused on the short term, on the outcomes that are currently measured for the purpose of performance reporting on the training system (that is module completion, jobs, income, satisfaction) and on outcomes for specific groups of VET clients. Consultations indicated the need for research on attrition, more work on qualifications, more research with a longer-term focus as well as research into what other outcomes should be measured.

VET in Schools. VET in schools has been growing very quickly in all States and Territories in recent years. There is a need for research into what is being achieved how it is working, who is participating and whether it is achieving its aims. A key focus for research should be the provision of career information and the growth of enterprise education.

The Role of the ANTA Key Research Centres and Partners

The ANTA Key VET Research Centres national project encompasses two research centres and two research partners. The program of research for the centres and partners are agreed with ANTA. Although the work of the centres and partners is not directed by the national research and evaluation strategy, the issues focused on by the centres/partners fall within the scope of the priorities outlined in the strategy and complement the work of NCVER and the national managed program.

The Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training (RCVET).

Based at the University of Technology, Sydney, RCVET supports a three-year program of research into the nature of vocational learning. The 2000-2002 program for RCVET incorporates five major themes:

1. **Changing Contexts of Vocational Learning**. What are the key issues for policy and practice emerging from the diversification of contexts of vocational learning, the increased significance of working knowledge and the development of new relationships between institutional and workplace learning?

2. **Changing Work, Changing Learning**. What are the main consequences of changing workforce trends for the conditions of vocational learning?

3. **Pedagogy of Flexible Learning**. What principles for guiding the development of flexible learning are emerging from current practices utilising new learning technologies?

4. **Participation in a Diversifying System**. Widening participation in vocational learning is a key policy ideal in a VET system which aims at 'lifelong learning for all'. Research can assist by moving beyond questions of access and target equity group 'representation' to ask questions about how the system interacts with client needs and what strategies produce equity outcomes. Policy also needs to attend more to resource allocation and system issues.

5. **The New VET Professionals**. As Vocational Education and Training adapts to new policy demands and the new economy, the work of VET professionals is being transformed. Changes to work and the de-institutionalisation of vocational learning have combined to produce new sites of learning and new ways of working with learners. Furthermore, these changing contexts have resulted in VET practitioners performing a variety of new roles in a variety of sites. This involves exercising a range of competencies at the leading edge of practice that is as yet poorly understood.

Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET)

CEET is a joint venture of Monash University and the Australian Council for Educational Research and collaborates with staff in the Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne. CEET's work focuses on the contribution of education and training to economic and social development and the implications of education and training of the changing nature of the Australian economy.

The organising theme for CEET's work for 2000-2002 is *Rapid economic change and lifelong learning*. Economic and social change provides a challenge to which Australia must respond for continued economic success and social well being. Knowledge and skills are becoming key determinants of individual, enterprise and national economic success. Investment in learning will become significant as the pace of economic and social change quickens. Lifelong learning provides an overarching framework within which education and training needs can be addressed.

CEET's main research areas are:

- Occupational and skill changes in the Australian economy and their implications for education and training; analysing and forecasting demand for training, student flows and labour supply.
- Participation and outcomes by diverse social groups
- Costs and financing of education and training; enhancing incentives for individuals and enterprises to invest in training; the VET workforce and staff development trends.

Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia (CRLRA)

The CRLRA is an ANTA Research Partner based at the University of Tasmania at Launceston. CRLRA's funding from ANTA for the period 2000-2002 is to investigate the role of VET in regional Australia. The aim of this three-year, longitudinal project is to investigate the contribution of VET to regional Australia and identify features of configurations of VET that are effective in meeting the needs of different stakeholders and communities.

The project will also consider the intersection of formal and non-formal VET with informal learning. The questions driving this study led to the selection of sites that represent different expressions of the concept of regionality. The definition of regions and its dimensions is to be refined as a result of this project.

The project will concentrate on 10 sites in regional Australia. Seven of the sites continue from research conducted in 1999, the remaining three to be chosen in 2000 according to criteria identified early in 2000. The project will build on questions asked in interviews and questionnaires in 1999 and develop a longitudinal data set that will be drawn on over the three years of this project.

Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Training (PCET)

The Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Training is an ANTA Research Partner based at the University of Melbourne and RMIT University. The centre has been funded to investigate the economic and cultural benefits of post-compulsory education and training from a client perspective. The work of the centre will focus on:

- How well systems of post-compulsory education and training work?
- What do students think of the range of economic and cultural benefits which education and training produce?
- Where, over a three-year term, do vocational, general and academic paths lead and who are the beneficiaries?

The aim is to follow the education and employment histories of about 30,000 young people and to prepare a global portrait of the impact of post-compulsory education and training on this cohort and its many sub-groups.

Questions will range across the socio-economic and academic background of students, access to programs, quality issues in training, the changing performance demands of the workplace,

the value of training relative to job demands, learning experience, course/module completion, social objectives, social attitudes, and employment destinations and mobility.

Research to date has thrown light on many of these issues viewed in particular contexts, but an integrated picture has been lacking. Moreover, data are needed at geographical, system and institutional levels which can be used to inform policy. The survey program will involve other research centres in Australia and will build on ongoing related research.

The Dissemination of VET Research

A critical element of the national VET research and evaluation strategy is to make sure that the body of research work that is building up in Australia is actually used more in by VET policy makers. Better decisions will be made if the results of rigorous and systematic analysis and research are incorporated into decision-making processes. This applies not only to policy but also to all decision-making processes in VET including planning decisions by VET providers and the choices made by employers and students about the value of VET and what training to support/undertake.

Consequently, a number of different measures have been identified to improve the dissemination and utilisation of VET research and evaluation work. These measures build on those developed under the previous strategy but go much further in making the results of research and of statistical collections available to a very broad range of stakeholders in the VET sector.

Publishing and distributing more research

A primary strategy in the wider dissemination of VET research and statistics is to publish and distribute a greater number of high quality VET research and statistical reports. This includes publishing more books, research reports, research papers, statistical publications and reviews of research in the *Review of Research* series. NCVER will extend its publishing policy to cover research other than that directly funded under the national strategy to any research reports submitted to NCVER that are judged to be of high quality and of critical interest to the VET sector.

The development of new research information products

Research flyers. A brief 'plain English' flyer is prepared for each completed research and evaluation project that is:

- undertaken by NCVER
- funded by NCVER
- published by NCVER

These flyers give brief details on the research and its findings as well as information on how to obtain the published report.

Research at a Glance. These are occasional publications, 2-4 per year, which summarise the results of both Australian and international research on particular themes or topics of interest to the VET sector. The format of *Research at a Glance* is succinct with an emphasis on policy/practice implications of research and including an extensive reference list to aid further investigation on the topic area.

NCVER Insight. Issued three times per year, this publication, in hard copy and on the web, takes the form of a research newsletter highlighting the latest VET research from within Australia and around the world. The results of new research are summarised and full details given of publications and authors so that interested parties can contact researchers directly. *Insight* also gives details of the latest research publications from NCVER.

Getting to Grips series. NCVER has developed a highly successful *Getting to grips with ...* series of good practice guides for VET practitioners. This series has been revitalised and expanded

under the research utilisation strategy to develop a *Getting to grips with* ... product from any suitable research project undertaken or funded by NCVER (including any VET statistical material). All NCVER projects will be examined for their potential for the development of *Getting to grips with* ... products. The results of other national (and international) research will also be examined for their potential to develop new *Getting to grips with* ... products.

World Wide Web

Increasingly, dissemination of research is taking place using the power of the World Wide Web to allow users from all walks of life to access and utilise the latest research and statistical information. NCVER is developing its website to become an electronic focus for VET research and evaluation.

Publishing on the Web. All reports written or funded through the NCVER are now published on the NCVER website as well as in limited run of hard copy. Users can access the reports for no charge and are able to download the text of a report or buy the published product.

Statistical data on the web. All NCVER statistical publications are now published on the website.

It is planned to develop the NCVER website substantially in the next two years and progressively load more research-based information that will be of use policy-makers and training providers.

Seminars, workshops and conferences

A key finding about research and statistical utilisation is that major stakeholders have little or no time to digest lengthy and complex material. However, retention of key findings can be enhanced through oral presentation and interactive discussion about the key issues raised.

Hence, an important element of dissemination is to run a series of face-face events which enable users to access the results of research in an interactive way. Traditionally, conferences have taken this role in the dissemination process. However, smaller workshop style events have many advantages over the traditional conference:

- Workshops are more tightly focused on specific themes and can be aimed at specific audiences of research users.
- Workshops can be replicated in different locations enabling NCVER to bring the research message to users in their locality.
- Workshops are cheaper to run than conferences and represent a lower financial risk to NCVER.

Five types of research-based workshops have been developed and will continue to run during the life of this national strategy.

Research policy briefings. These 2-3 hour briefings carried out for State/Territory Training Authorities and other training agencies are focussed on the latest research findings from NCVER and national managed projects and NCVER statistics of relevance to policy makers. A first round of these briefings was conducted in 1999 and a second round will be undertaken in 2001.

Research Forums. These half-day workshops are focussed on specific research themes from the NCVER and the national managed research program. They involve presentation by researchers to audiences of users and are highly interactive. The forums are held in capital cities and have a very low admission cost. It is planned to run six forums per year.

Practical/Skills Workshops. These ½ - 1 day workshops will be aimed at RTOs to enable them to undertake research-based activities that will facilitate their development. Themes for the workshops include:

- Evaluation and assessment
- Dataworks
- Undertaking a student outcomes survey
- Surveying employer views of training
- Undertaking an attrition survey

These workshops are currently under development. The first of these may be run in late 2000 on the theme of evaluation and assessment.

Researcher Seminars. These ½ day seminars are aimed at small groups of VET researchers. Researchers undertaking national managed projects on a common theme present their work to a small group of other researchers and invited participants from DETYA, ANTA and STAs. The aim of the seminars is to increase researcher interaction and add value to the stock of research being undertaken. About 3-4 researcher seminars are run each year.

The option to hold full conferences will continue and be used where appropriate. A number of VET research centres hold conferences throughout the year.

The VOCED International VET Research Database

The VOCED research database provides abstracts and author, title and publication details about VET research reports, published papers, journal articles, conference papers, policy papers and VET statistical material. The database covers all Australian VET research materials and international material published in English with coverage to 1995.

Since its enhancement into a global database VOCED provides:

- world-wide access to the latest research information and instant access to author, title and keyword searches of information on VOCED
- direct submission of material from Australia's 20-plus VET research centres as part of the establishment of memoranda of understanding between NCVER and all other Australian VET research centres to share VET research
- direct coverage of VET and educational journals to ensure comprehensive coverage of published domestic and international VET research on VOCED
- Coverage of monographs on VET from a range of international VET agencies.

The VOCED research database has been transformed into a powerful VET research tool by capturing and indexing all specialist VET journals and other relevant education and training journals that are published in English. VOCED is the leading international database of VET research and allows Australians involved in VET access to the latest research results from Australia and overseas. The process of transforming VOCED into a world-class international VET research database involves the indexing and abstracting of both national and international material. This will comprise all Australian VET-related journal articles, key international VET-related journal articles and all major research publications from international VET agencies. These agencies include the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). In addition, publications of key Australian and international VET or VET-related research centres such as the United States National Centers for Career and Technical Education (NCTTE) will also be indexed and abstracted for the VOCED database.

Promoting greater public awareness of VET issues

NCVER recently adopted a policy of examining each and every piece of completed research it undertakes and/or publishes to:

- determine whether or not there is a message suitable for placement in the mainstream or specialist VET/education/industry media
- prepare articles (and briefings where appropriate) in such cases
- in some cases involve ministers in the launch of such materials to get wider publicity

NCVER will establish a capacity for article preparation and placement across relevant Australian specialist and mainstream print media. This will involve a pro-active approach to key media editors and writers.

A more pro-active approach to the radio (and, very occasionally, TV) media will also be explored for some key areas.

A much wider public awareness of VET issues and the benefits of VET is necessary. It is interesting to note that ANTA has embarked on a major market research/marketing program this year in an attempt to raise the public profile of VET in Australia.

Australia's Place in the International VET Research Community

VET research is becoming increasingly internationalised. This reflects the importance that vocational education and training has assumed in the developed world in the last ten years and increasingly in developing countries that are improving their skills base in order to foster industrial development. The impact of globalisation on labour markets means that Australia now competes for skilled labour directly with other countries. At the same time, Australia is increasingly an exporter of vocational education and training, particularly in the Asian region. Thus the VET system in this country is inextricably bound to developments in other countries. The activities of multinational corporations, which dominate much of the Australian economy, place demands on the VET system to meet their global requirements for skilled employees. As a result, governments throughout the world are looking to research and evaluation to underpin their responses to the key policy challenges in vocational education and training. Despite international differences in the operation of VET, these challenges are remarkably similar from one country to another and include:

- Improving transitions from education to work
- Reforming the financing of VET systems
- Creating flexibility in the provision of VET to meet the changing requirements of the labour market
- Improving the level of continuing training, especially that provided by enterprises
- Reforming systems of entry-level training
- Improving the provision of training for adult and older employees
- Responding to the emergence of lifelong learning.

These key areas feature in the VET research and evaluation programs of most countries, particularly in the developed world.

There is a strong tradition of comparative research in the social sciences in Australia. This is also true in VET research and evaluation. In recent years both ANTARAC and NREC have funded research that has attempted to put VET in Australia into an international perspective. There is a need to increase our comparative research activities to inform better policy development and practice. But it is important to remember that comparative research is a two-way process; Australia has much to learn from other countries but the rest of the world has also much to learn from developments in Australia. The significant international interest that continues to be shown in the Higher Education Contribution Scheme is a good example of the latter.

Australia also plays an important role in international agencies concerned with vocational education and training. Australia has been a key player in the development of UNESCO's technical and vocational education initiative, UNEVOC. There are three very active UNEVOC centres in Australia, which ensure that Australian VET research plays an increasingly important role in the international VET community. Australia also plays a significant role in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD has funded a number of very important and influential comparative research projects in the area of vocational education and training and Australia has benefited from its participation in this large-scale comparative work.

Australian VET researchers and research centres are increasingly involved with their overseas counterparts. The formation of the International VET Association (IVETA), which held its annual conference in Sydney in 1999, is a good example of the growing international VET

research community and of the important role that Australian researchers play in it. Many Australian VET research centres have established strong ties with similar centres overseas. NCVER has played an important role in this regard with its system of Memoranda of Understanding with key international VET research agencies such as the South-East Asian Ministers for Education Organisation vocational education centre in Brunei (SEAMEO VOCTEC), Colombo Plan Staff College (CPSC) for Technician Education based in the Philippines, the Central Institute for Vocational and Technical Education in the People's Republic of China (CIVTE), the Bundesinstut fur Berufsbildung (BIBB) in Germany, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) of the European Union, the Korean Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET). Such agreements lead to the exchange of research information and the development of joint comparative research between the centres. Many Australian VET researchers also maintain extensive links with international colleagues which form the basis for the increasing level of international VET research undertake in Australia.

Australia now boasts a world-class national VET research and evaluation program. Fragmentation, disparate funding sources and a lack of national vision are often characteristics of much VET research carried out internationally. In Australia, the existence of a comprehensive national VET research funding program guided by a national research and evaluation strategy lends Australian VET research a level coherence, relevance and consistency which is often lacking in overseas programs.

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